

This Week In Congress

May 10, 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Condemning Iraqi Prisoner Abuse

During the past week, photos of Iraqi prisoners being tortured and humiliated made headlines around the world. The investigation into alleged abuses began in January, but it wasn't until the release of several photographs that it captured people's attention. It is a regrettable that the disgraceful actions of a few soldiers will reflect poorly upon our troops and our country.

This development is unbelievable to me and greatly complicates our situation in Iraq. I have long said that the opportunity for success in Iraq only exists if the Iraqi people are supportive of U.S. and coalition efforts to bring stability and a new form of government to the country. We have been struggling for broad support of the people, and this episode makes that support much more difficult to get or keep. Worse, more revelations apparently are coming. As the investigation into these abuses continues, we must hold those responsible for the abuses accountable for their actions.

Urging VA Committee to Examine Medical Policies for Deployed, Returning Troops

This week I requested that the House Veterans' Affairs Committee investigate the health care policies regarding the pre- and post-deployment physical examinations of troops returning from service in Iraq, Afghanistan and other overseas deployments. Earlier this spring, the Pentagon began scaling back the medical exams of soldiers returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

In 1997, I supported legislation that was enacted into law which required the Department of Defense to provide pre- and post-deployment medical examinations for troops deployed overseas. During previous military engagements, post-deployment medical exams were not routinely given, which hindered the ability of doctors to diagnose illnesses that developed months or years after duty.

While serving as Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, I conducted numerous hearings to ensure that medical data was being collected from soldiers both before and after their time in combat so they would receive proper treatment for their combat-related injuries. However, a January 2004 memorandum from the Army discouraged the routine post-deployment physical examinations.

We have a duty to protect the health of today's active duty soldiers and tomorrow's veterans. At a time when more than a hundred thousand troops are serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Department of Defense should not discourage medical exams for soldiers returning home. This may significantly impair the VA's ability to diagnose and treat the health care needs of future veterans.

Kicking-Off Crop Insurance Summit

On Friday morning, I gave opening remarks at a crop insurance conference on the issue of multi-year loss at the Risk Management Agency's office in Kansas City, Missouri. The Risk Management Agency invited companies, universities and private sector research entities from across the country to more fully identify the problem and to submit proposals for addressing the effects of higher premiums and lower coverage as a result of drought.

As the Chairman of the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, I have made the issue of multi-year loss a priority. Declining insurance yield guarantees from multi-year loss was a subject in several hearings last year and will continue to be at the forefront of my agenda. In addition to multi-year loss, I have met with the Risk Management Agency several times to work on ways to improve risk protection for farmers.

Farmers in Kansas have been faced with extreme drought during the past several years. Crop insurance is intended to provide farmers with assistance when crops fail. However, insurance coverage has declined as a result of multiple years of drought. We must deliver adequate crop insurance to drought-stricken farmers, and this forum is a way to expedite the process.

A full copy of the speech can be found at: http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/sp050704RMA.html

VA Expanding Health Care Services for Hutchinson Area Veterans

On Friday, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi, approved the Capitol Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission findings on the efficiency and necessity of the VA facilities in Kansas. The CARES Commission recommended expanding services at all Kansas VA facilities, in addition to adding a community-based outpatient clinic in Hutchinson.

For more than four years, the commission has been reviewing all of the VA facilities in the United States to ensure that the current and future health care needs of veterans will be met. The CARES Commission submitted its findings to Secretary Principi in February. The Secretary has reviewed the Commission's findings and will now submit his decisions to Congress to review and authorize. Secretary Principi visited the VA facilities in Wichita, Salina, Topeka and Leavenworth with Moran in 2002.

The commission also recommended enhancing the primary and specialty care services at the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical and Regional Office Center in Wichita, as well as continuing the operation of the Dwight D. Eisenhower VA Medical Center in Leavenworth. The board recommended continuing inpatient psychiatry services at Topeka, expanding outpatient substance abuse treatment at Leavenworth, and maintaining nursing home care beds at Leavenworth. Emergency care services would continue at the Topeka and Leavenworth campuses.

It is good news for Kansas veterans that the VA has recognized the need for another

community-based outpatient clinic. Bringing health care services for veterans closer to home will cut down on the long distances veterans must travel to receive routine care. I will continue working to improve VA services for veterans throughout Kansas' communities.

Improving Railroad Security

On Wednesday, I participated in the House Transportation and Infrastructure hearing to examine the security of our nation's freight, intercity passenger and commuter rail transportation. During the hearing, federal and rail industry outlined post-September 11 steps taken to address rail transportation security and the additional precautions necessary to continue to protect U.S. railroads and passengers from potential terrorist attacks.

We need to place great emphasis on the detection and prevention of an attack on our rail lines. It is also important that we work on improving our ability to adjust to such an incident in order to keep our people and goods moving efficiently.

Preventing Tax Increases on the Middle Class

On Wednesday, I supported House passage of legislation that would prevent tax increases on millions of middle-income families and individuals in 2005. The Middle-Class Alternative Minimum Tax Relief Act, H.R. 4227, extends through 2005 the higher Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) exemption amounts. As a result, the exemption amounts for 2005 would be \$58,950 for joint filers and \$40,900 for single taxpayers. Without enactment of H.R. 4227, the current exemption amounts will automatically fall in 2005 to \$45,000 for married couples and to \$33,750 for single taxpayers. This legislation now goes to the Senate for Consideration.

"Rockin' the Night Away" at Hays High Dinner Show

On Saturday evening, I attended the 15th Annual Hays High Dinner Show, "Rockin' the Night Away," presented by the HHS Chamber Singers. The Singers are directed by Ms. Elise Peterson, and accompanied by my wife, Robba. The students did an outstanding job of singing and dancing to music from the 1950's to the present. It was another example of quality education our students receive in Kansas.

Honoring Fallen Officers

On Friday, I joined law enforcement officers from across the state to honor officers who were killed in the line of duty at the 22nd annual Kansas Law Enforcement Memorial Service at the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka. We honored those who risk their lives on daily basis for the safety and security of others. This year, the name of former Ford County Sheriff Investigator, Bret Tepe, was added to the memorial. We extend our deepest sympathies to the family of Officer Tepe.

Visiting Plainville Nursing Home

On Sunday afternoon, I kicked off National Nursing Home Week at the Rooks County Nursing Home. National Nursing Home Week is a good time to visit friends and family. The facility was bustling with activities as residents and their families came together to celebrate Mother's Day.

Nursing homes are an important part of the health care delivery system in Kansas. Kansans value the many nursing homes across the state that provide quality and compassionate care. The dedicated administrators and staff should be especially recognized for their efforts in caring for our seniors.

This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the Rooks County Nursing Home. During my college days, I was a maintenance worker at this facility. I was pleased to be a part of the celebration.

In the Office



Emily Sitz of Garden City and other members of the Kansas Library Association were in the office this week to discuss copyright issues and the Patriot Act. Members of the Kansas Electric Cooperative were in to discuss the energy bill and renewable fuels, as were representatives of the Kansas Hospital Association to discuss recent changes to Medicare. Jerry Brown of Haddam was in on behalf of the American Honey Producers Association to discuss trade issues.

Very truly yours,

Jerry